

Mobile Technologies Put Language Learning into Young Second Language Learners' Hands

Martine Pellerin*

Campus St. Jean, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada

Abstract. This paper examines the use of mobile technologies such as iPods and tablets in promoting the development of oral competencies and literacy skills in early French immersion classrooms in Canada. The paper is based on a two-year collaborative action research project involving 16 teachers in two schools. Data collection involved digital ethnographic observation in the classroom, students' artifacts (examples of the use of iPods and tablets by students), teacher interviews, and student interviews. The findings demonstrate that the young language learners use these mobile devices as tools to practice not only their oral skills in the target language through individual and group activities, but also their literacy skills (reading and writing). In addition, by providing more authentic and frequent experiences in using the target language, the use of the iPods and tablets has positive outcomes on the development of oral language skills. The young learners also demonstrate an increase in their motivation to use the target language following the use of the mobile devices. The results indicate the potential of the use of oral language and iPods/tablets in promoting the development of early literacy skills (reading and writing). The iPods/tablets also provide a kind of scaffolding to the writing process by linking the oral language with the written form. Finally, the use of the oral language with the support of mobile technologies promotes new forms of assessment tools for the teachers; it also promotes self-assessment by the learners, as well as peer assessment.

Keywords: mobile technologies, young learners, oral language, second language, literacy skills, assessment.

1. Introduction

Research in the field of second language learning in the last few decades has provided ample evidence of the positive impact of the use of technologies in assisting students' language learning. However, most of the studies have been mainly concerned with the language learning processes of high school students and

* Contact author: pellerin@csj.ualberta

mature learners. The emergence of mobile technologies such as iPods and tablets into the classrooms, particularly in settings that involve young learners, is bringing new possibilities to assist language learning and early literacy development. Educators are also starting to contemplate the potential of these emergent technologies to support authentic language experiences and literacy development, as well as new forms of assessment. The present study investigated the use of mobile technologies such as iPods and tablets in promoting the development of oral competencies and literacy development in early French immersion classrooms in the Canadian context.

2. Method

The study used a qualitative, interpretative research methodology that made use of *collaborative action research* (CAR). The CAR approach calls for direct participation from the teachers in the inquiry process, which then impacts upon the teachers' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills; such changes in turn contribute to changes in their pedagogical practices (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007). The study involved 16 teachers and their students from two elementary schools that hosted early French immersion programs, in a rural school district in a western Canadian province. The distribution of the French immersion teachers was as follows: four Grade 1 teachers, three Grade 2 teachers, one multilevel teacher (Grades 1 and 2), three Grade 3 teachers, two Grade 4 teachers, and two resource teachers.

The CAR model used for the study was based on the model developed by Pellerin (2011), which focuses on a university – school partnership in order to implement an alternative model for professional development. The teachers in their respective classrooms collected the initial data on an ongoing basis. Teachers gathered digital documentation (audio and video recordings) achieved by the students themselves using mobile devices such as iPods and tablets. The university researcher was also engaged in data collection through classroom observation, and digital ethnography about how students were documenting their own language learning process with the use of these mobile technologies.

Further data were gathered at the end of the first and second years of the project through semi-guided interviews with the teachers, which allowed the teachers to share their experiences with the use of the new and emergent technologies in their classrooms. The triangulation of these data from multiple sources allowed for interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), and continual data analysis was achieved by means of “thick description” or layers of interpretation (Geertz, 1973). The data analysis was achieved with the use of a coding process aligned with qualitative research approaches (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3. Findings and discussion

Several key themes that emerged from this inquiry have contributed to the co-construction of new knowledge and understanding about how the use of mobile technologies such as iPods and tablets contribute to the development of oral competencies and literacy skills in young language learners. First, the findings show that the use of iPods and tablets have positive outcomes on the development of oral language skills by providing more authentic and frequent experiences in using French, the target language. The young learners in the study were able to engage in different activities that called on the use of the oral language with the support of the iPods and tablets. For example, students were making audio and video recordings of puppet shows, storytelling and retelling, dramatic play, creation of songs, show and tell about personal experiences, sharing of their background knowledge and thinking process, describing authentic and meaningful tasks such as “how to make a bubble with gum” or “how to eat an Oreo cookie”. Through listening to and viewing their own audio/video recordings of their use of the second language, students were able to reflect on their work and to judge what was good about it and what needed to be improved. The young learners also demonstrated an increase in their motivation toward using the target language following the use of the mobile devices, by making several recordings of the same activities with the intent to improve each time.

The results also indicate the potential of the use of the iPods/tablets in promoting the development of early literacy skills (reading and writing). Students used the iPods/tablets to record their voices while reading, as well as to video record their reading process. The digital documentation (digital audio and video recording) made by the students provided the teachers with tangible evidence of their students’ reading process. Teachers had access to evidence of how their students were trying to decode, the types of strategies they were using, and the mistakes they were making. The students’ nonverbal language and their actions (for example, coming back to the beginning of the line to reread a word) were also captured through the video recording. Together, the teachers and the students were able to engage in dialogue and interpretation about the students’ abilities to read, and the strategies that needed to be developed in order to increase reading fluency. During the period dedicated to literacy centers in the Grade 1 and Grade 2 classrooms, iPods were also used to listen to audio-recorded books based on students’ own reading abilities and interests. Therefore, the use of these technological tools allowed for more reading aloud experiences that model good use of the second language. It also enabled students to hear vocabulary being used in context.

The iPods/tablets also provided a kind of scaffolding to the writing process by linking the oral language with the written form. Teachers from Grades 1 to 4 encouraged their students to use the iPods and tablets to document their planning process for their writing project. For some students, the act of putting ideas on paper represents a true

challenge, especially in the context of second language learning. Therefore, students were encouraged to use the technological tools to first record their ideas orally. Then they could go back and revisit the recording to guide their writing process. For many students, this documentation and self-assessment became part of their writing process. They would first dictate their ideas on the iPod in French, and then they would listen to the digital recording to help them transfer their ideas onto paper. Later, the same students would read aloud what they had written and record it once again on the iPod. They would revisit the latest digital documentation and would orally add new ideas or changes that they felt could contribute to improving their story.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that the use of iPods and tablets contributed to gathering digital documentation about the students' learning and thinking process in the second language. Moreover, it enabled both teachers and learners to revisit the digital documentation, allowing for a deepening of the learning process. The revisiting process also promoted a process of reflection on learning by the teachers, thus acting as a form of formative assessment. The revisiting of the documentation between teacher and student also provided scaffolding for self-assessment and peer assessment. By engaging students in revisiting the content of their audio/video recordings, the teacher modeled the process of reflection and self-assessment necessary for the students to become aware of their own language learning process and progress.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrated that the use of mobile technologies such as iPods and tablets holds great potential for promoting the development of oral competencies and early literacy skills in the second language context. Moreover, the use of these new and emergent technologies by young language learners contributes greatly to our understanding of early literacy development in the second language context. In particular, the use of such technologies can provide valuable information about the learning processes of students with specific needs and/or students who are experiencing difficulties with literacy skills or showing delays in second language development. The use of mobile technologies also allows teachers and researchers to explore how digital video and audio recordings can be used as assessment tools to inform teachers' instructional practice. It also contributes in guiding the learner in his or her own learning process. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, the use of mobile technologies such as iPods and tablets allows young learners to become ethnographers of their own second language learning and literacy development.

References

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (3rd ed.). London, England: Sage.

- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The interpretation of cultures* (pp. 3-30). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2005). Participatory action research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 559-604). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nolen, A. L., & Vander Putten, J. (2007). Action research in education: Addressing gaps in ethical principles and practices. *Educational Researcher*, 36(7), 401-407. doi: [10.3102/0013189X07309629](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309629)
- Pellerin, M. (2011). University-school collaborative action research as an alternative model for professional development through AISI. *AISI Journal*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.uleth.ca/education/research/research-centers/aisi/aisi-journal/new-issue/vol1-no1-2011>

Published by Research-publishing.net
Dublin, Ireland; Voillans, France
info@research-publishing.net

© 2012 by Research-publishing.net
Research-publishing.net is a not-for-profit association

CALL: Using, Learning, Knowing
EUROCALL Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden
22-25 August 2012, Proceedings
Edited by Linda Bradley and Sylvie Thouësny

The moral right of the authors has been asserted

All articles in this book are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License. You are free to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the publisher.
- Noncommercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works: You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Research-publishing.net has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Moreover, Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before (except in the form of an abstract or as part of a published lecture, or thesis), or that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the authors, the editors, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover design: © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
Aquarelle reproduced with kind permission from the illustrator: © Sylvi Vigmo (sylvi.vigmo@ped.gu.se)
Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-03-2 (paperback)
Print on demand (lulu.com)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2012.